

CLAUDE'S BIG TROUT.

BY MAURICE THOMPSON.

CLAUDE, who was a bright, cheerful boy, ten years old, dearly loved to go with his father to his summer house in the mountains, where, with some friends, that gentleman spent the most of June, July and August every year.

There was a small brook near the summer house, which tumbled over great heaps of stones and old mossy logs. The water was very clear and cold. Claude delighted in playing by the brook. At night the sound of its babbling waves lulled him to sleep. When morning came, the first thing he would hear would be the murmur and swash of its shoals. This brook was so very small that Claude's father and the other gentlemen did not pay any attention to it when they went angling, as in fact they did almost every day.

One morning Claude said to his father :

"Papa, please fix me a rod and line to fish with. I should like to try in the little brook."

The gentlemen all smiled in a manner which led Claude to think they doubted his ability to catch a fish.

"I saw a great big one in a deep place up in the woods," said Claude.

"A big what?" asked one gentleman.

"Why, a big trout, that's what," said Claude.

"As big as your finger?" inquired his father.

Claude opened his eyes till they were very round.

"A great deal bigger," he said—"as big as my wrist, and bigger, too.

"Did it have pinchers and lots of legs?" said one of the gentlemen.

"Speckled trout don't have claws and legs," replied Claude. "I know what you mean. You think I saw a crawfish, but I'll show you a great big trout if you'll fix me up a little rod and line."

So, to please him, his father gave him a little rod made of split bamboo, and a fine line with a hook and fly on it.

Next morning, after the gentlemen were all gone to their sport, Claude went to try for his big trout. It was a beautiful shady place, under some small trees, where the brook, after tumbling down a steep

stony channel, fell with a noisy, palpitating sweep into a deep basin, in which lived a brook trout of uncommon size. Claude had often watched him leaping above the water to catch the flies that danced on the surface.

"Now, old fellow, I will catch you," he thought, as he chose his place to stand, close by the pool where he could cast the hook and fly far out on the dancing waves of clear, cold water.

His heart jumped, so excited was he in anticipation of great sport. He had never angled any; but he had seen his father and other gentlemen casting their lines, so it did not take him long to get quite handy with his rod. But somehow the trout did not notice his fly. Time after time he cast it, so that it fell on the very ripples where he had seen the fish leap up. He threw out and drew in his line so many times that his arms grew very tired; but he was so intent on catching the big trout that he hardly noticed this. Indeed, hour after hour flew by, and still he stayed and kept on casting the fly.

At last his reward came. Scarcely had the bright fly touched the water when, with a great splash, the fish leaped up and seized it. The rod came near going out of Claude's hand, such a jerk the trout gave. He recovered his presence of mind very quickly, however, and then he gave the fish a little more line. How it did run round, and leap and flounder and struggle! It made great bubbles on the water. Claude held it pretty firmly, steering it free from the places where it might entangle the line in roots or drift-wood. It was a race between them, which should first tire out—the trout or Claude. His arms ached, so hard did the fish pull to get away.

Finally Claude's pluck and perseverance conquered. Carefully and by degrees he steered the fish to a shallow close to the bank. Then he shortened his line by winding it on the reel till he could hold it with his left hand and seize the trout with his right hand.

O, what a beauty it was! It would weigh nearly a pound, and its scales were all purple and red and silver, with spots that shone like rainbow colors. The

hook was in the tough part of its lip ; and O, how it did jump and wriggle when Claude lifted it out of the water ! It was the largest speckled trout that Claude had seen in many a day. In fact, the brooks in that region afforded very few fish as big as this one.

At first he was glad and proud of his triumph over the strong trout, but when he saw the suffering of his

captive his child heart was touched with pity. He held it in his hand a while, looking half-proudly, half-sorrowfully at its bright sides and delicately-shaded back. Then he carefully took the hook out of its lip and put it back into the water. It gave a great flip with its tail, throwing drops of water into Claude's eyes, and then it darted away into the deepest and most turbulent part of the pool.



CLAUDE CATCHES THE TROUT.

"Why, what upon earth did you do that for?" cried a voice behind him, and on turning around Claude saw his father and another gentleman standing near him. They had come to look for him, and had witnessed his clever struggle with the fish. They were surprised that he would let the trout go, it was such a large and beautifully marked one.

"I didn't want the poor thing to die," said Claude.

The gentlemen tried and tried to catch that old trout after that, but it was too wise for all of them.

It did not care to be hauled around by the lip again so it refused to rise to even the most tempting fly.

When Claude returned to the city, he went about telling all his young friends how he caught the biggest and prettiest trout that ever he saw. He showed them how he braced his feet and pulled to keep it from getting away from him, and how it made his line fairly sing around through the water. They all stood and listened to his earnest description of that adventure till they wished they had been with him to fish in the noisy mountain brook.